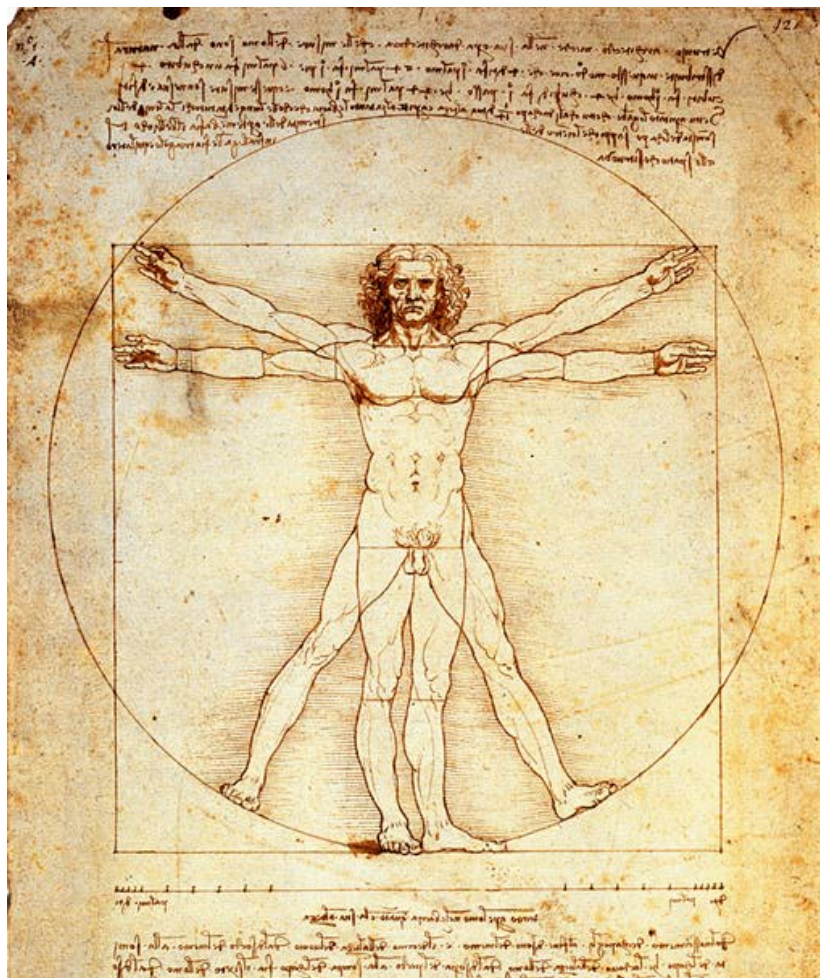




Communist University Introductions

These texts may be used as “openings to discussion” of the original reading texts that are supplied by the CU. They are not intended to be authoritative or conclusive. They are contributions to discussion like any other such contributions. The introductions are not a substitute for the reading texts.

Philosophy and Religion, Part 5



Uomo Universale: Man, the Measure of the Universe

Freedom

Before we consider the main downloadable text of this post (see below), which is [Christopher Caudwell's](#) essay on "Liberty", here are two quotations from Caudwell via Helena Sheehan, taken from [Helena Sheehan's Christopher Caudwell web page](#), preceded by Sheehan's remarks. These quotations bear on the fundamental question of "*which is first, mind or matter*".

The act of knowing transformed what was known. It was never possible to detach the thing known from the knowing of it. Caudwell opposed all passivist imagery in describing knowledge. Knowledge was not a matter of copying, mirroring, photographing, reflecting. Although he never remarked on Lenin's use of such imagery in [Lenin's] *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, he had read the book and his rejection of the reflectionist model was quite explicit and polemically expressed. In no uncertain terms, Caudwell made his point:

"The mirror reflects accurately: it does not know. Each particle in the universe reflects the rest of the universe, but knowledge is only given to human beings as a result of an active and social relation to the rest of reality."

In terms of the debate within [Lenin's] [Materialism and Empirio-Criticism](#), [Caudwell's] was neither the position of Lenin nor that of Bogdanov. Nor was it the position of Lukacs or Korsch either. It was perhaps the position Gramsci was groping for, but never expressed with such confident clarity as Caudwell. When it came down to it, being preceded knowing, knowing flowed from being and evolved as an extension of being. Decidedly post-Cartesian, Caudwell asserted: I live therefore I think I am. In a concise statement of the fundamental contours of his theory of knowledge, he wrote:

"The question of which is first, mind or matter, is not therefore a question of which is first, subject or object ... Going back in the universe along the dialectic of qualities, we reach by inference a state where no human or animal bodies existed and therefore no minds. It is not strictly accurate to say that therefore the object is prior to the subject any more than it is correct to say the opposite. Object and subject as exhibited by the mind relation, come into being simultaneously.... We can say that relations seen by us between qualities in our environment (the arrangement of the cosmos, energy, mass, all the entities of physics) existed before the subject-object relationship implied in mind. We prove this by the transformations which

take place independent of our desires. In this sense, nature is prior to mind and this is the vital sense for science. These qualities produced, as cause and around produce effect, the synthesis, or particular subject-object relationship which we call knowing. Nature therefore produced mind. But the nature which produced mind was not nature "as seen by us." . . . It is nature.... as having indirect not direct relations with us.... Such a view reconciles the endless dualism of mentalism and objectivism. It is the universe of dialectical materialism. Unlike previous philosophies, it includes all reality: it includes not only the world of physics, but it includes smells, tastes, colours, the touch of a loved hand, hopes, desires, beauties, death and life, truth and error."

Caudwell on Liberty

Christopher Caudwell's "Studies in a Dying Culture" were published at a particular moment in history. Caudwell had been killed while defending the Republic in the Spanish Civil War **[Image below: Caudwell on the eve of his departure for Spain, from a group photograph]**. With its references to his contemporaries H G Wells, Bertrand Russell, and E M Forster (and the 18th-century philosopher Jean-Jaques Rousseau) Caudwell's essay may seem dated at first glance, but actually, like a lot of Caudwell's work, it remains critical today and right up to date, in a time when the question of the free-willing human Subject is once again at the forefront.



[Christopher Caudwell, 1907 - 1937](#)

"Implicit in the conception of thinkers like Russell and Forster, that all social relations are restraints on spontaneous liberty, is the assumption that the animal is the only completely free creature. No one constrains the solitary carnivore to do anything. This is of course an ancient fallacy. Rousseau is the famous exponent. Man is born free but is everywhere in chains. Always in the bourgeois mind is this legend of the golden age, of a perfectly good man corrupted by institutions. Unfortunately not only is man not good without institutions, he is not evil either. He is no man at all; he is neither good nor evil; he is an unconscious brute.

"Russell's idea of liberty is the unphilosophical idea of bestiality... The man alone, unconstrained, answerable only to his instincts, is Russell's free man. Thus all man's painful progress from the beasts is held to be useless. All men's work and sweat and revolutions have been away from freedom. If this is true, and if a man believes, as most of us do, as Russell does, that freedom is the essential goal of human effort, then civilisation should be abandoned and we should return to the woods. I am a Communist because I believe in freedom. I criticise Russell, and Wells, and Forster, because I believe they are the champions of unfreedom."

Caudwell had got to the heart of the matter: **"I am a Communist because I believe in freedom,"** he wrote. And what is that? Of all politicians, only those who are communists will be able to answer the question "What is freedom?" in a satisfactory way. Others will echo the sophisticated Bertrand Russell's bourgeois-romantic version of freedom, as a return to the condition of the wild beasts, or else they will say little, or nothing.

"Power to the People" is our slogan. This is the essence of our project. It means that the masses will have agency. The masses will be human, which is to say, able to think and to act upon their thoughts. This is the active freedom that Caudwell writes about. *"This good, liberty, contains all good,"* he says.

After Caudwell, and after the war that ended in victory over the fascists against whom Caudwell had fought with his body as well as his pen, bourgeois thinkers did not embrace Caudwell's idea of liberty. Instead, they fled to irrational, anti-humanist and even outright anti-human philosophies: existentialism, positivism, structuralism, and especially the overtly irrational "Post-modernism" that became the house philosophy of Imperialism. Some of them declared "The Death of the Subject". In other words, they denied human free will.

In 2002 another English author and philosopher called [James Heartfield](#) defied the Post-Modernists and published a book called “The ‘Death of the Subject’ Explained” thereby helping to inspire the Johannesburg Communist University that started in 2003. Heartfield kindly allowed the CU to use some extracts from his book. These are featured in the next item within this part.

We communists are for freedom. We are human, not pre-human or post-human. We are part of a liberation movement, not only of the colonially oppressed, but of humanity worldwide against Imperialism. We are the ones with the theory of freedom. It is the source of our morality. Power to the People! Amandla!

The concept of the free-willing human Subject is the most valuable product of philosophy, including the philosophy of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. We are going to defend it, including, if necessary, against the concept of materialism, if materialism is taken to say that human life and culture is only a transitory arrangement of molecules.

The image at the top of this post is the “*Uomo Vitruviano*” of Leonardo da Vinci, from the humanist period of the Italian Renaissance. Its meaning is that Man (humanity) is the measure of the Universe.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Liberty, a Study in Bourgeois Illusion, 1938, Caudwell](#).
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“The ‘Death of the Subject’ Explained”, cover graphic

The Subject Lives

In the previous post we said that in the late 20th Century, irrational Post-Modernism became the house philosophy of Imperialism. Some declared the “Death of the Subject”, thereby denying the possibility of human free will, or agency.

[James Heartfield](#)’s 2002 book called “The ‘Death of the Subject’ Explained” confronted the Post-Modernists. Among other things, this book helped inspire the Johannesburg Communist University that started in 2003. Heartfield kindly allowed the CU to use extracts from the book. Some of these are contained in today’s main linked document, below. The illustration above is from the cover of the book.

What Heartfield manages to do very excellently is to make clear the nature of “Post-Modernism” by contrasting it polemically with the basic question of philosophy, which is the relationship between the human Subject (individual and collective) and the external, objective, material universe.

Post-modernism had flourished in the haze and half-light that was the consequence of “Western” bourgeois anti-communism, hardly challenged, and veiled in mystification and obfuscation.

Whereas outright fascism had promoted the “triumph of the will”, or in other words pure subjectivism, post-modernism became a prophecy of impotence and fatalism, also sometimes called determinism.

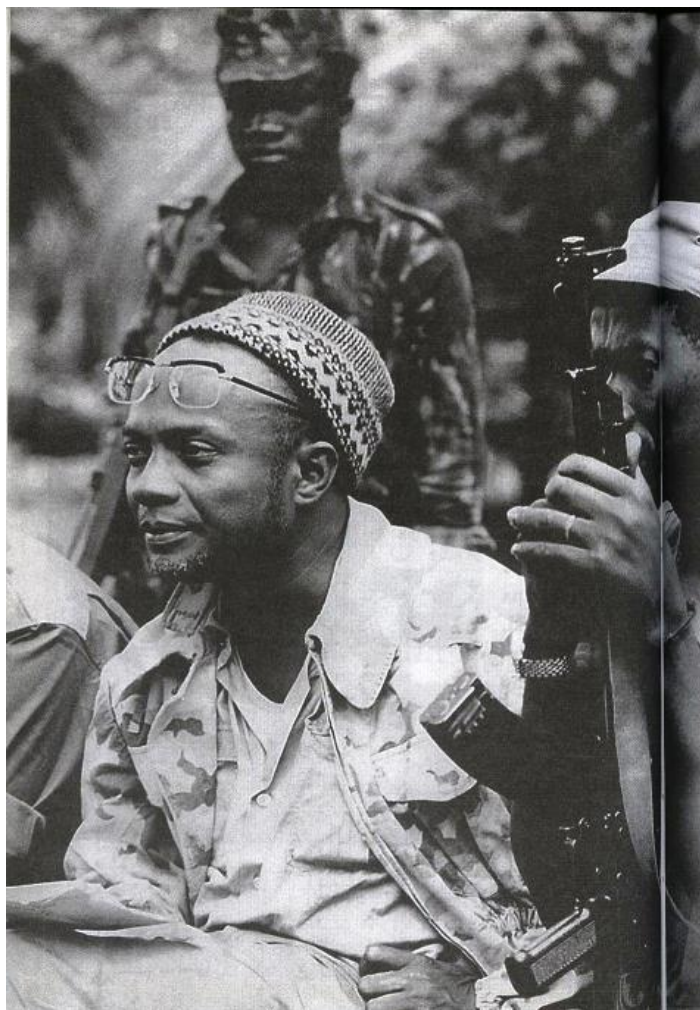
Heartfield showed that these trends (i.e. both pure objectivism and pure subjectivism), though each appeared to be opposite to the other, yet both amounted to the same thing, namely anti-humanism, which in our time is anti-communism.

The human being exists, and can only exist, in the meeting place of Subject and Object. This is the master dialectic. This is the site of production.

The first three pages of this document are a very brilliant explanation of the basis of society as it is in fact presently constructed around the freely willing human Subject. The following fifteen pages comprise a somewhat detailed account of the growth and the ramifications of post-modernism in the second half of the 20th Century.

In the thirteen years that have passed since the publication of Heartfield's book, it appears that the former ascendancy of post-modernism in the academy and in the intellectual community as a whole is now a thing of the past, and that the free-willing human Subject has re-asserted itself. This coincides with the resurgence of Marxist thought and criticism in the world, of which Heartfield's book is an example.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Death of the Subject Explained Selection, 2002, Heartfield.](#)
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[Amílcar Cabral, 1924 - 1973](#)

Weapon of Theory

The [Tricontinental Conference](#) of the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America was held in Havana, in January, 1966, 46 years after the Baku [Conference of the Peoples of the East](#) and seven years after the Cuban Revolution.

Forty-nine more years have now passed since the Tricontinental. A lot has been achieved in that time, including our South African democratic breakthrough, twenty-one years ago, and the unbanning of the ANC and the SACP, twenty-five years ago.

The full defeat of Imperialism has not yet occurred. What we can positively say is that from early in the 20th-Century the historical agenda was set by the liberation movements, and that Imperialism represents the degeneration and the decline of bourgeois class power, and not its heyday.

The great political change in the world in the last century was the taking of sovereign independence by the formerly oppressed people of the former colonies, affecting the great majority of the population of the planet, and opening the road of democracy for them.

This gigantic movement and vast change was achieved with **the weapon of theory**. In other words, the movement had a conscious philosophy.

49 years ago Amilcar Cabral, in the speech to the Tricontinental that has always been known by the title “Weapon of Theory” (attached, and linked via the download, below) said the following:

“It is often said that national liberation is based on the right of every people to freely control its own destiny and that the objective of this liberation is national independence. Although we do not disagree with this vague and subjective way of expressing a complex reality, we prefer to be objective, since for us the basis of national liberation, whatever the formulas adopted on the level of international law, is the inalienable right of every people to have its own history, and the objective of national liberation is to regain this right usurped by imperialism, that is to say, to free the process of development of the national productive forces.

“For this reason, in our opinion, any national liberation movement which does not take into consideration this basis and this objective may certainly struggle against imperialism, but will surely not be struggling for national liberation.

“This means that, bearing in mind the essential characteristics of the present world economy, as well as experiences already gained in the field of anti-imperialist struggle, the principal aspect of national liberation struggle is the struggle against neo-colonialism.”

Amilcar Cabral was a true vanguardist. He was both a great leader, and a great intellectual.

Please download the document via the link given here.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The Weapon of Theory, 1966, Amilcar Cabral.](#)



Dialego, Philosophy, and Class Struggle

In 1976, in the year of the Soweto uprising, ten years after the “Tricontinental”, four articles were published in the African Communist, written by [John Hoffman](#) under the pen-name “Dialego”. The first two are linked below, as our main texts for today.

Hoffman still teaches philosophy as an Emeritus Professor at Leicester University in England. He is no longer trying to be a revolutionary, but is an overt liberal these days. His liberalism of today is foreshadowed in these works of three and a half decades ago. His liberalism, now, is a child of his “Dialectical Materialism”, then. “Dialectical Materialism” is not always revolutionary. It can also be liberal. We will develop this argument in due course.

Hoffman’s four articles were subsequently republished, more than once, as a set, in a booklet. (Click here for [Part 3](#) and [Part 4](#) if required). The articles were popular with MK and are still famous. They certainly raised the banner of theory high. But they contained major deficiencies, of which the principal one is “Dialectical Materialism” itself, as presented by Dialego.

Hoffman (in his Part 2) writes of “Materialism vs. Idealism: the Basic Question of Philosophy”. But the Fundamental Question of Philosophy is the relation of the Subject to the Object, and not “Materialism vs. Idealism”. Glaring errors arise if and when these two different formulations are conflated into one.

For example, going back to Hoffman’s Part 1 under “Philosophy and Our ‘Experience’”, Hoffman writes about “stress[ing] the materialist component of our

philosophy at the expense of the dialectical”. This is a muddle. What he is describing is what he himself is doing: idealising the objective factors of a situation, while all but eliminating the human Subject.

An original causation is demanded, which then has to be given a higher status than all else. Out goes God the Creator; in come the atoms and the molecules.

In this way of thinking (dialectical materialism) the atoms and the molecules, the inanimate *a priori* material, take precedence over life. This is “ashes to ashes, dust to dust” dressed up as revolutionary theory. But it cannot be.

Revolution is a quality of life, not ashes.

The dialectic that is political is the one between subjective humans and the objective universe (which is indeed material). In this political dialectic, the human Subject is “**the point**”.

As Marx wrote in the 11th Thesis on Feuerbach: “Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; **the point** is to change it.” Who’s point is that? It is our point. It is the human beings’ point. We are humanists. We are on the side of the humans, and of their humanity, which we ourselves have created and continue to create out of the world’s mud, through labour.

A purely material event is like a tree falling in the forest, unseen and unheard by anyone. It is an event, but it is not a political event.

Similarly, a switch from an imaginary world of superstition, to one that fetishises inert material, is no gain at all. These are merely two different forms of idealism.

In both these latter cases, powers are held up that are higher than people, whether the powers are invisible or visible. But in politics, the power that matters is people-power. For sure, that means people-power in a real, material world. But it does not mean a “balancing act” between the human and the inhuman.

There is no dialectic of the ideal versus the material. These two categories are not interdependent, but constitute alternatives: either/or.

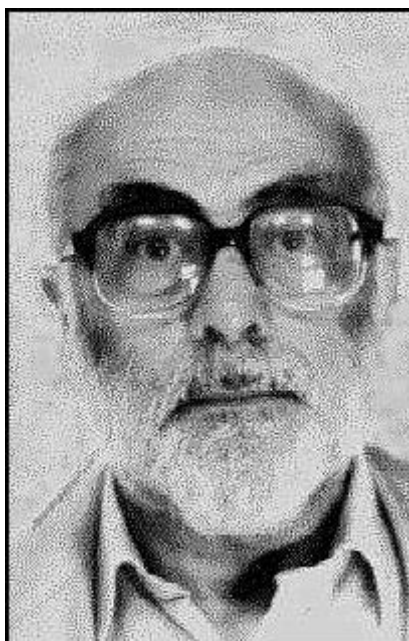
But there is certainly a dialectic of the Subject and the Object, because these two categories define each other. They are inseparable in their opposition to one another. But people still come first. People have priority. The Subject, who labours, is what it is all about, and not the material Object.

Hoffman's (then) devotion to "materialism" led him to write that "[man] developed out of the world of nature through a long process of evolution and his ideas are the product of the mental activity of his brain, itself a highly developed and complex form of matter."

How does a "complex form of matter" become human? Actually, it is not even necessary to ask. It is only Hoffman's kind of "materialism" that leads to such miserable, reductionist questions: questions that run away from humanity.

The atoms and the molecules may be taken as "given", whether by God or by chance. But humanity is special, while matter is only matter. Humanity is historical, while matter is infinite. Humanity is revolutionary work-in-progress. Humanity is what humans make. Making humanity is what humans do. It is the free-willing human Subject that is at the centre of our consciousness, our concerns, our morality, and our politics.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-texts: [Dialego, Part 1, Necessity of Theory, 1976, John Hoffman](#) and [Dialego, Part 2, Theory of Action, 1976, John Hoffman](#).
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[Cyril Smith, 1929 - 2008](#)

Marxism, or Marx?

[Cyril Smith](#), late in life, and following the fall of the Soviet Union, felt himself free enough to challenge the principle Shibboleths of Marxism, including the word “Marxism” itself. Students may think that here and there, Smith did not quite succeed in resolving all his issues. For example, he approves Marx's aim of “development of communist consciousness on a mass scale” but disapproves, in another place, of what he considers to be Lenin’s determination to do the same thing “from outside” (This CU course will continue to examine that particular question).

But otherwise, Cyril Smith succeeds admirably to hit and to knock down his targets, which are the dead wood and the rotten branches of 165 years and more of “theory”, and he does us a great service thereby.

This makes Smith’s work ideal as a means of introducing to this course a set of propositions about the work of Marx, Engels and their successors, and asking whether their ideas have stayed on track, or whether they have been reversed, or overturned, by those who have claimed to be their carriers down the years.

We may quickly get close to the heart of the matter by first looking at Smith’s talk on “The Communist Manifesto After 150 Years” (attached, and linked below), and in particular at the section headed “The Subject of History”. In this section, the daily

practice of communists (“to educate, organise and mobilise”) coincides with the most profound depths of philosophy. It begins:

“Marx’s problem was to discover the possibility for humanity, individually and collectively, to take conscious charge of its own life, and to find this possibility within bourgeois society. Communism would mean that humans would cease to be prisoners of their social relations, and begin purposively to make their own history. In other words, we should cease to be mere objects and start to live as subjects.”

It is not unreasonable to say that this is the whole matter of Marx, Lenin, communism and the work of all the communists that have ever been. This text is offered as the main reading and discussion text for this part. You may use the section on “The Subject of History” for discussion, because it is concise and sufficient, but do also, if possible, read the entire document, for the light that it sheds upon the [Communist Manifesto](#) of 1848.

Image: The late Cyril Smith’s passport photograph.

The full Cyril Smith archive on MIA [can be found here](#).

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The Communist Manifesto after 150 years, 1998, Smith](#).
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[Evald Ilyenkov, 1924 - 1979](#)

“Capital”: Not Doctrine, but Critique

In the year following the 150th anniversary of the 1848 “Communist Manifesto”, Cyril Smith took on Marx’s premier work, “Capital” in his [“Hegel, Economics, and Marx’s Capital”](#) (attached, and linked below).

Smith showed how generations of Marxists have got it very wrong.

In particular, Smith shows us how “Capital” (the book) is not about “economics” or about what even Great Lenin mistakenly called “Marx’s Economic Doctrine”, but is really what it says it is: “A Critique of Political Economy”.

Equally mistaken, Smith shows, is the vulgar conception of the relation between Hegel’s work and Marx’s, and here Smith could have drawn support from [E. V. Ilyenkov](#) [Image, above].

Ilyenkov’s [“The Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx’s Capital”](#) was published in the Soviet Union in 1960.

No doubt, Smith is not the first to rediscover the real Marx, and he will not be the last.

Apart from giving us a very good reminder to pay proper attention to what we are reading, Smith is also validating the CU policy of reading the original work more than the commentators and the analysts (see, e.g., the [CU Generic Course on Capital, Volume 1](#)).

The next post will deal decisively and comprehensively with Stalin and Stalinism. It will lift the Stalinist load from off the back of Karl Marx, and refresh Marx's legacy.

The full Cyril Smith archive on MIA [can be found here](#).

- **The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Hegel, Economics, and Marx's Capital, 1999, Cyril Smith](#).**
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How Stalin buried Marx

Cyril Smith is very effective in dealing with the phrase “dialectical materialism”, which was never used by Marx, was invented by Kautsky and Plekhanov, and was turned into a catch-phrase by Stalin. The **attached** item is Chapter 2, “How the Marxists Buried Marx” (linked below), from Cyril Smith’s “Marx at the Millennium”, published in 1998. On the third page of that chapter, Smith wrote:

“... it is appropriate to begin with one of the most widely circulated philosophical statements of the twentieth century. It starts like this:

“Dialectical materialism is the outlook of the Marxist-Leninist party. It is called dialectical materialism because its approach to the phenomena of nature, its method of apprehending them is dialectical, while its interpretation of the phenomena of nature, its conception of these phenomena, its theory, is materialistic.

“Historical materialism is the extension of the principles of dialectical materialism to the study of social life, an application of the principles of dialectical materialism to the phenomena of the life of society, to the study of society and of its history.”

“This stuff appeared in 1939. In my view, its method, standpoint, dogmatic style and conclusions are all utterly opposed to everything that Marx stood for.”

The author was J. V. Stalin. A little later Smith writes (and he could have been writing about “Dialego”):

“Let us bring ourselves to look briefly at the way the Stalinist catechism of 1939 hitched up a highly mechanised materialism with something called

*‘dialectics’. On the one hand, ‘Nature, being, the material world, is primary, and mind, thought, is secondary.’ What does this word ‘primary’ mean? Does it mean ‘first in time’ or ‘first in importance’? Or does it mean that matter ‘causes’ changes in ‘mind’? Nobody can tell, and precisely **this ambiguity conferred mysterious power.**”*

Smith shows how even Lenin had been fooled by the catch-phrase:

*“In the preface to his 1908 book *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, Lenin declared: ‘Marx and Engels scores of times termed their philosophical views dialectical materialism.’ He was so sure about this, that he felt no need to give any references.*

*“In fact, there is not one! Marx never employed the phrase in any of his writings. The term ‘dialectical materialism’ was introduced in 1891 by Plekhanov, in an article in Kautsky’s *Neue Zeit*. He thought wrongly, I believe, that he was merely adapting it from Engels’s usage in *Anti-Duhring* and *Ludwig Feuerbach*.”*

Cyril Smith did a good job. His work can help those who would wish to liberate themselves from the dead hands of Plekhanov, Kautsky and Stalin.

Cyril Smith also does not spare Trotsky, with whom he otherwise appears to have had some sympathy. The most serious deficiency he finds in Trotsky, however, is not any of Trotsky’s sins of omission or dissembling, but Trotsky’s lack of philosophy, and his failure to get any of his followers to make up his own deficiency. While Lenin made great progress in philosophy, Trotsky failed altogether, writes Smith.

What Smith is saying is that in the last analysis, it was the inability to overcome the Philistine, Stalin, through full command of philosophy, which led to the degradation of the Russian Revolution and its eventual reversal. Philosophy is the keystone. Without it, the other stones are bound to fall. Smith says of the Trotskyists:

“But they never had the theoretical resources to penetrate to its philosophical core. The best they could do was to show that Stalinist policies and distortions were contrary to the decisions of Lenin’s party and the teachings of ‘Marxism’.”

The Trotskyists were trapped within the same hall of mirrors that they had helped Stalin to construct.

The practical work of philosophy is, crucially, to weed out or clip off the words, dead of meaning, that encumber and trip us in our work; or otherwise, if possible, to restore their freshness. Some of those words in our present time might be: “hegemony”, “accumulation”, and “elements of socialism”.

The full Cyril Smith archive on MIA [can be found here](#).

- **The above is to introduce the original reading-text: How the Marxists Buried Marx, 1998, Smith, [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#).**
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[Paulo Freire, 1921 - 1997](#)

Pedagogy

In the first sentence of Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of The Oppressed" (**attached**, please find Chapter 1, or use the link below) Freire "problematizes" humanisation.

"...but while both humanization and dehumanization are real alternatives, only the first is the people's vocation," says Freire.

This immediately places Freire side-by-side with Karl Marx, where Marx in the whole of "Capital", and all his life, wanted to restore humanity to itself.

Or again, as in the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, where Marx wrote:

"Criticism has plucked the imaginary flowers on the chain not in order that man shall continue to bear that chain without fantasy or consolation, but so that he shall throw off the chain and pluck the living flower."

Here, on page 3 of Chapter One of the "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", is Freire's answer to "Dialectical Materialism":

"... one cannot conceive of objectivity without subjectivity. Neither can exist without the other, nor can they be dichotomized. The separation of

objectivity from subjectivity, the denial of the latter when analyzing reality or acting upon it, is objectivism. On the other hand, the denial of objectivity in analysis or action, resulting in a subjectivism which leads to solipsistic positions, denies action itself by denying objective reality. Neither objectivism nor subjectivism, nor yet psychologism is propounded here, but rather subjectivity and objectivity in constant dialectical relationship.

Neither objectivism nor subjectivism but rather subjectivity and objectivity in constant dialectical relationship: this could serve as a one-sentence summary of our course on Philosophy and Religion. Freire goes on, while explicitly embracing his connection with Marx:

“To deny the importance of subjectivity in the process of transforming the world and history is naive and simplistic. It is to admit the impossible: a world without people. This objectivistic position is as ingenuous as that of subjectivism, which postulates people without a world. World and human beings do not exist apart from each other, they exist in constant interaction. Man does not espouse such a dichotomy; nor does any other critical, realistic thinker. What Marx criticized and scientifically destroyed was not subjectivity, but subjectivism and psychologism.”

The significance of the Subject in Freire’s theoretical scheme is clear all the way through and is demonstrated by these words from the last paragraph of his Chapter 1:

“Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators.”

The Communists, in their own minds and in their intentions, seek to educate, organise and mobilise, not so as to command the working class and the general masses, but to set them free.

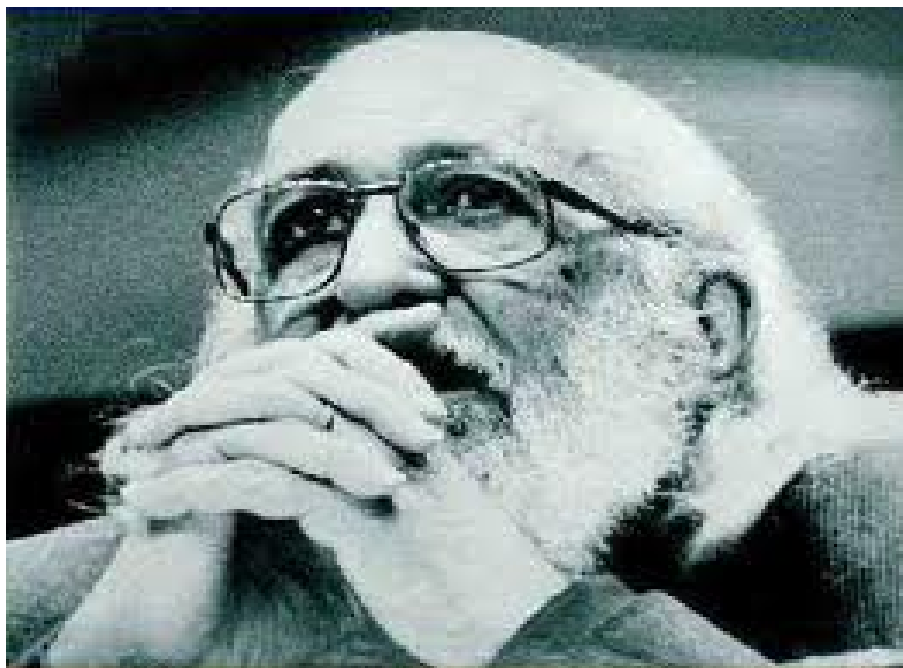
The problem of how to do so is exactly the problem that Freire addresses in “The Pedagogy of the Oppressed.” It requires the formulation quoted above: **“World and human beings do not exist apart from each other, they exist in constant interaction.”** Nowhere does Freire refer to materialism, whether dialectical or otherwise. He writes about leadership and people both being Subjects, and co-intent on reality.

This is the interface that gives meaning to both education and to politics, and it is rooted in philosophy.

We are talking of revolutionary pedagogy. We are talking here of teaching with a purpose and a reason that anyone can understand (i.e. “intentionality”) – especially the students. We are talking of liberation. In South Africa, this is called “people’s education for people’s power”.

In the next chapter we will dwell upon the dreadful mistakes that can be made if we fall into the errors of what Freire calls “the banking theory of education”.

- **The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Pedagogy of The Oppressed, Chapter 1, 1970, Freire.](#)**
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[Paulo Freire, 1921 - 1997](#)

Down with the Banking Theory!

It was Paulo Freire who gave us the word “conscientise”.

It was Paulo Freire, more than any other, who showed how the bourgeois education system, with its “**banking**” theory of pedagogy is not well designed to educate learners in the true sense of the word “educate”, but is principally and intentionally designed to help reproduce the class relations that suit the bourgeoisie. Please read today’s text, **attached**, and downloadable via the link at the bottom of this document.

Education, which should by nature liberate the student, is made by the bourgeoisie into a means of repression, said Freire.

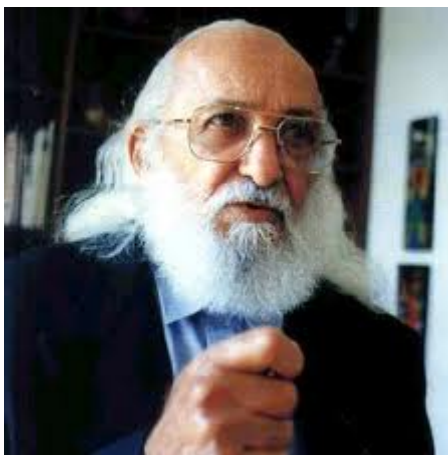
How can we make sure that education becomes part of the building of socialism and communism? To ask such a question is to “problematise” education. To ask such a question is to begin a “dialogue” about education.

Freire thought that for the political education of the oppressed, if it was not to be patronising and therefore counter-productive, by reproducing and reinforcing features of the oppressive bourgeois state, then the method for this purpose would have to be different and new.

In the dialogical method that Paulo Freire devised and called the Pedagogy of the Oppressed, or otherwise Critical Pedagogy, there is no elementary, junior, senior, matriculation, undergraduate, post-graduate, doctorate or professor level. Teachers are learners and learners are teachers; all are free-willing subjects, capable of leadership at any moment.

As much as there may be a room and a gathering of individuals, each known by name, and a “codification” which is the text or other object prepared for the occasion, yet the dialogue admits no imaginary limits. The Freirean gathering is not sheltered. It is one of the essentials of Freirean Pedagogy that we refuse the fiction of the sheltered classroom, and instead recognise that the oppressor is around us and even within us, while we strive to liberate ourselves through our mutual, pedagogical dialogue.

In Freirean practice, there is no such thing as a basic level, or an advanced level. All that we can do is to practice a common process of “problematizing”, beginning with education itself.

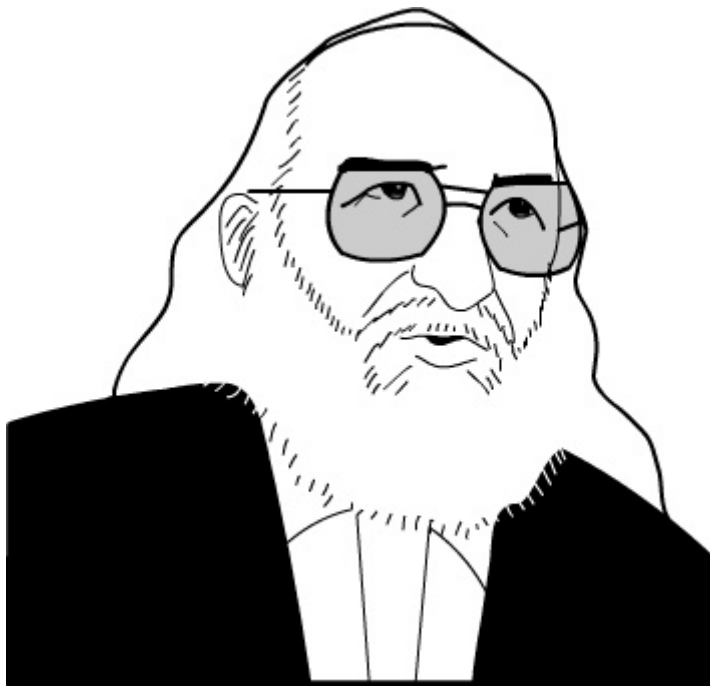


For the late Freire (pictured here and at the top), and for the Freireans of today, all education is a political act and a social act, an act of liberation and an act of self-liberation.

In Freire’s work, philosophy, politics and education are considered together without any sharp borders between them.

Chapter two is the shortest and the easiest of the four chapters of Freire’s “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”. Please download it and read it.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Pedagogy of The Oppressed, Chapter 2, 1970, Freire.](#)



Paulo Freire, 1921 - 1997

Not Activism, Not Blah

Action / Reflection = word = work = praxis

Sacrifice of action = verbalism

Sacrifice of reflection = activism

What separates communist philosophy in particular, and humanist philosophy in general, from other kinds of philosophy, is that we humanists see life as an interaction between the human Subject and the Objective universe. Others either believe in pure (subjective) will, or in pure (objective) fate.

This communist philosophy is not a compromise; nor is it an artificial “middle way”. It sees a dialectical unity-and-struggle-of-opposites.

The human Subject defines the universe, and the universe contains the human Subject.

In Chapter 3 of the Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire manages to express all this with immense power, and then to develop it into a praxis (theory-and-practice), which is dialogue.

Here are the some few paragraphs from this chapter:

Verbalism without action is idle chatter

“As we attempt to analyze dialogue as a human phenomenon, we discover something which is the essence of dialogue itself: the word. But the word is more than just an instrument which makes dialogue possible; accordingly, we must seek its constitutive elements. Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed - even in part - the other immediately suffers. There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world.

“An unauthentic word, one which is unable to transform reality, results when dichotomy is imposed upon its constitutive elements. When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter, into verbalism, into an alienated and alienating “blah.” It becomes an empty word, one which cannot denounce the world, for denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action.













Activism is action for action’s sake, making dialogue impossible

“On the other hand, if action is emphasized exclusively to the detriment of reflection, the word is converted into activism. The latter - action for action's sake - negates the true praxis and makes dialogue impossible. Either dichotomy, by creating unauthentic forms of existence, creates also unauthentic forms of thought which reinforce the original dichotomy.

“Human existence cannot be silent nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world. To exist humanly is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new naming. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection.

“But while to say the true word - which is work, which is praxis - is to transform the world, saying that word is not the privilege of some few persons, but the right of everyone. Consequently no one can say a true word alone - nor can she say it for another, in a prescriptive act which robs others of their words.”

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Pedagogy of The Oppressed, Chapter 3, 1970, Freire.](#)

Plan	Construct	Manage		Plan	Construct	Manage
			Regulators or Public Sector			
			Suppliers or Private (commercial) Sector			
			Users or Popular Sector			
Locally self-governing or autonomous housing systems				Centrally administered or heteronomous housing systems		

Who decides?

This is Part 8 of a course on Philosophy and Religion. In this part, so far, we have looked at three chapters of Paulo Freire's "The Pedagogy of the Oppressed", with Chapter 1 of that book being taken as the default discussion text for study-circle purposes.

Although "The Pedagogy of the Oppressed" is on the face of it a book about education, yet what we have found is that the author has felt himself compelled to reach down to the very foundations of philosophy so as to find a firm ground upon which to rest his educational theories.

In the process, Freire enriches the literature of philosophy, as well as that of education, by re-stating the dialectics of the Subject and the Object, using it to illuminate education, and as a return gift to philosophy, providing an object lesson in the meaning of philosophy and making a good illustration of what philosophy is for.

Similarly, in the world of urbanism and housing, philosophy is an absolutely practical necessity, and although the fields are different, yet the philosophy applied remains much the same.

John Turner, author of "Housing by People" (see the linked chapters below), was preoccupied with the same foundational problem (subjectivity; agency; freedom) as Freire. Turner problematised it as a relationship of "paternalism and filialism" (father-ism and child-ism), which is immediately recognisable as the very opposite of the "co-intent Subjects" proposed as a solution by Freire.

Turner writes:

“Paternalism and filialism, the modern descendents of attitudes more generally associated by Europeans with the Middle Ages, are still very common attitudes in Britain. These are especially evident in the common assumption that the 'ordinary' citizen or 'layman', is utterly dependent on the 'extraordinary' citizen or the 'professional', who cultivates the mystery of his or her activity in order to increase dependency and professional fees.”

Paternalism means fatherliness while Filialism means taking the posture of the child. Turner means that professionals, as well as the State, take a parental role, while the people are infantilised.

Turner's diagram

The diagram above is from Turner's "Housing by People". It shows "who decides" in two different kinds of housing project: the locally self-governing or **autonomous** one on the left; and the centrally-administered-from-above or **heteronomous** type, on the right.

Turner says that it is not necessary for people to be so extremely autonomous that they must do everything for themselves, like land-owning peasants. Such a life is very hard, cruel, backward, limited and unsocialised. Yet, if all decisions are taken out of the hands of individuals, they cease, to that extent, to have "agency"; they cease to be Subjects; they cease to be free; they cease to be human.

In South Africa, with its "RDP Houses", it is easy to see that nearly all the decisions that affect the people in the area of "Housing" are taken far above their heads. The right-hand part of the above diagram applies, in full. The possibilities for leaving decisive power in the hands of the popular masses, like in the left-hand part of the diagram, have been closed.

Such decisions include the location, demarcation and distribution of houses, their design and quality of building, and the provision of amenities and services. The people who must then live in these houses do so without any of their autonomous culture, except to the extent that it is contained in their living persons.

Karl Marx, in the Manifesto, wrote that "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all." By application of that philosophy to the field of housing, we can see that what South Africa has executed in this field is in general something far less than freedom. Even such freedom as could have been available, has mostly been over-run by "heteronomy" (decision by others).

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Housing by People, C1 and 6, Who decides?, 1976, Turner](#).



[Bartolomé de las Casas, 1484 - 1566](#)

Liberation Theology

In the last third of the 20th Century a phenomenon arose that recalled Marx's "Introduction to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right", where Marx said:

"...the criticism of religion is the prerequisite of all criticism."

And:

"The criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo."

In other words, the criticism of religion was only a starting-point, and not the main business. The main business is the restoration of humanity to itself, not so much from out of the clutches of the religious clerics, but more so from the under the boot of the bourgeoisie. The struggle begins, not against religion, but within religion.

And so it came to pass that in the 1960s there arose, within and among the ranks of the religious, a movement which had the same essential aims that Marx had. This was Liberation Theology. The hierarchy of the Catholic Church in particular

recognised it for what it was, and suppressed it. The hierarchy of the Protestant denominations saw it for what it was, and co-opted and neutered its remnants, revising Liberation Theology's "base community" idea into the sectarian "basic Christian community", and thereby reversing the liberation that Liberation Theology had brought.

But in the mean time, Liberation Theology had a life, and it left a legacy.

Father Joe Falkiner used sometimes to attend the Communist University. The main attached/linked item today begins with an article of Father Joe's from 2006 on Liberation Theology and Scripture, and continues with a short history of Liberation Theology from two more of its well-known practitioners, Leonardo and Clodovis Boff.

Father Joe quickly mentions that Liberation Theology *"often used the educational methods of Paulo Friere"*, and that they used original scriptural texts, just as the Communist University uses mainly original texts, and preferably not second-hand commentary or analysis. Father Joe writes: *"... the theology was done jointly by these people in the shantytowns and their priests, not solely by traditional theologians based in seminaries and universities."*

This is what we as the CU do with politics, as well as religion, using Paulo Freire's methods.

We do not have a good picture of Father Joe Falkiner. Instead, the picture above is of [Bartolomé de las Casas](#), a member of the same order (the Order of Preachers, a.k.a. Dominicans) as Father Joe.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Liberation Theology, 2006, Falkiner, L and C Boff](#).
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Peter McLaren and Gustavo Fischman

Organic Intellectuals

Father Joe Falkiner (featured in the previous course post) also mentions Gramsci, and **organic intellectuals**. The main item today in this penultimate part of our current course has the long title: “Rethinking Critical Pedagogy and the Gramscian and Freirean Legacies: From Organic to Committed Intellectuals or Critical Pedagogy, Commitment, and Praxis”. It is by Gustavo Fischman and [Peter McLaren](#), who are present-day exponents of [Critical Pedagogy](#), or in other words what is referred to by Joe Falkiner as “the educational methods of Paulo Friere”.

The McLaren/Fischman article immediately starts to grapple with “the notion of teachers as transformative intellectuals”. We are back with Cyril Smith’s problem with Lenin – the problem of the legitimacy or otherwise of “outside agitators” – and the problem of Marx’s aim of “development of communist consciousness on a mass scale” (which Cyril Smith somehow managed to simultaneously approve of).

How are you going to make revolution, if the maker of revolution must be the masses, and not yourself?

Alternatively, if you had a method of educating the masses, what else would you need in the way of revolution? Is there any difference between politics and political education? Or is it a trinity that is at the same time a unity, namely: Educate, Organise, Mobilise?

Paulo Freire concentrated his intellectual fire on the single most practical priority, which at the same time requires the deepest philosophical clarity, and called it “**The Pedagogy of the Oppressed**”.

Fischman and McLaren make clear, by reference to Gramsci, that such a Pedagogy of the Oppressed is a direct form of class struggle. It is a direct confrontation with the interests of the bourgeois state. It is an open contradiction of the bourgeois class dictatorship as applied through state-led education as well as through the instructive function of the judiciary.

The authors note that Gramsci is often misappropriated ([see also CU](#)). They write: *“Because Gramsci identified civil society as an arena used by the ruling class to exert its hegemony over the society, the struggle for Gramsci was not to transform civil society but rather, as Holst points out, ‘to build proletarian hegemony’.”* That is, proletarian ascendancy, also known as the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Fischman and McLaren are rejecting the view of “hegemony” as a “Third Way” that could by-pass revolutionary confrontation.

After discussing Gramsci’s organic intellectuals, and as if to answer Cyril Smith’s doubts, they quote Gramsci as follows:

“Critical self-consciousness means, historically and politically, the construction of an elite of intellectuals. A human mass does not ‘distinguish’ itself, does not become independent in its own right without, in the widest sense, organizing itself; and there is no organization without intellectuals, that is without organizers and leaders, in other words, without the theoretical aspect of the theory-practice nexus being distinguished concretely by the existence of a group of ‘specialized’ in conceptual and philosophical elaboration of ideas.”

Fischman and McLaren go on to argue for the “committed intellectual”, with “an unwavering commitment to the struggle against injustice”. What is the difference between a committed intellectual and a communist cadre? No difference at all! In that sense, what McLaren and Fischman have managed to do is to compose a very elegant justification of **the vanguard party**, rooted in the most profound philosophy.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Organic Intellectuals, 2005, McLaren and Fischman](#).
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[Meera Nanda](#)

Philosophical Battlefield

*This week brings the last of the ten parts of our CU Generic Course called “Philosophy, Religion, and Revolution”. There will be three items, of which this is the first. The suggested item for discussion is the last one: Ron Press’s “**New Tools for Marxists**”, linked below; but if you can at least skim the other two, the discussion will be more complete. Hence the change of order.*

The question of the collective human subject has been most concisely and forcefully expressed in this series by Cyril Smith in the section of “[The Communist Manifesto after 150 Years](#)” called “**The Subject of History**”.

The first linked download for this final part is “Postmodernism & Hindu Nationalism” by the philosopher [Meera Nanda](#) **[pictured]**. This work is given because it shows how several pathological, anti-human strands of philosophy can play out in concert, mutually reinforcing and amplifying each other. In the case of India as shown in this article, these were Postmodernism; Hindu Nationalism (“Hindutva”); “Vedic Science”; and reactionary feminism.

Time has passed since the CU first began using this text. Ten years ago it was cutting-edge, and it is still useful to South Africans because the question of rational science, of feminism and of “Congress” politics and of potential successors to “Congress” have meaning for us. But Postmodernism has receded. It is no longer so sure of itself or so hegemonic as in the past.

Meera Nanda described her purpose thus:

“This essay is more about the left wing-counterpart of [Yankee] Hindutva: a set of postmodernist ideas, mostly (but not entirely) exported from the West,

which unintentionally ends up supporting Hindutva's propaganda regarding Vedic science. Over the last couple of decades, a set of very fashionable, supposedly "radical" critiques of modern science have dominated the Western universities. These critical theories of science go under the label of "postmodernism" or "social constructivism". These theories see modern science as an essentially Western, masculine and imperialistic way of acquiring knowledge. Intellectuals of Indian origin, many of them living and working in the West, have played a lead role in development of postmodernist critiques of modern science as a source of colonial "violence" against non-Western ways of knowing."

The Indian case is not altogether different to what was, and could again be, the situation in South Africa, where under President Thabo Mbeki we had Postmodernism (bourgeois "normality" following the liberation struggle); pseudo-science around HIV/AIDS (Virodene, African potato, beetroot et cetera); Africanism; and again, reactionary feminism.

What is common to all of these aspects, whether in India or in South Africa, is the evacuation of popular agency and refusal of the mass Subject of History following the liberation struggle, which in both cases had promised this (mass popular agency) above all other things. In India the promise was "[Swaraj](#)" and in South Africa, "**Power to the People**".

Independence and national sovereignty were supposed to be inseparable from mass popular agency. In practice, political independence co-existed with bourgeois dictatorship and neo-colonialism, and these latter factors trumped and negated mass popular power. The flight from mass popular agency was a middle-class and bourgeois betrayal of the workers and the poor.

Revolutionary organs of people's power were dismantled in each case. Golden Calves were raised up for worship, in substitution for the slogans of popular power. The substitutes were slogans of bourgeois nationalism and of national mystique.

Postmodernism is the hopeless, degenerate philosophy of the hopeless, degenerate thing called Imperialism. The fight for full freedom in a world dominated by Imperialism was unavoidably a fight against Postmodernism. It is a revolutionary necessity. The purpose of this CU Generic Course called "Philosophy, Religion, and Revolution" has been to arm the communists for such battles. Above all what is needed is devotion to and priority for the human Subject, i.e. **Power to the People!**

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Postmodernism and Hindu Nationalism, 2004, Nanda](#).



Fidel Castro with Nikita Khrushchev

Cuba, Khrushchev and the 20th CPSU Congress

This Communist University has constantly upheld the central idea within Marx's "Capital" and within Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed". That idea is the full restoration of the human Subject as an individual, within human society, making humanity out of a material world.

This dialectic of the individual and the collective was most succinctly expressed by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in the following famous words, which we have quoted more than once before, from the Communist Manifesto of 1848:

"... the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."

The Communist University has also upheld the SACP's constitutional stricture to "Educate, Organise and Mobilise". We do so in the conviction that our mission is not to Influence, or to Guide. Such words are used when education is abandoned by those who have no faith in it. "Influence" and "Guide" are only stalking-horses for

“Command” and “Control”, when the latter two tyrants are too ashamed to raise their heads.

In its Freirean educational practice, the Communist University has never sought to preach. It has opened doors to dialogue and never closed them. The Communist University codifies, but it does not prescribe.

When education succeeds, and the working class is restored to its full humanity as a Subject of History, then why would any of these insecure and furtive options (Influence, Guiding, Command and Control) be required? None of them will be required.

Hence we say as Communist University: Education is the means by which organising and mobilising are done. Education is more than a preparation for politics. Education is the method of politics and the very substance of politics, which, when considered broadly, excludes all other substances. Education is the essence of humanism.

This message is simple, and the Freirean method of carrying it out is clear. For now, the best illustration of the idea of education as the substance of political practice is Cuba, a country that has become one big university - a “society of knowledge”. Please see the article (download linked below) by Cliff DuRand for an exposition of this concept, including the [“Universalization of the University”](#).

In addition, and to make the same point in a different way, we give (downloadable below) an example and a warning of the manner in which a previous revolutionary upsurge faced the problem of the revolutionary Historical Subject, and failed to solve it, with disastrous consequences.

The [All-Union Communist Party \(Bolsheviks\), Short Course](#) (a.k.a. simply “Short Course” was an attempt to create, from the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union up to 1937, a totalised theory, free of error, for the Soviet Union itself and for the world communist movement as a whole. We came across it while studying [Christopher Caudwell](#) through [Helena Sheehan](#), and finding material on [J D Bernal](#) and [J B S Haldane](#) on Sheehan’s web site. This material mentions the *Short Course* and the failure of the latter two otherwise outstandingly independent-minded communist scientists to oppose it.

The physical torture and elimination of comrades in the Soviet Union were shrouded in secrecy and obscurity, and even the “show trials” that took place were to the Western communist observers problematic because of the confessions of the accused. Yet the CPSU of the day did have to “lay out its stall” in public, as all

political organisations are compelled to do. The CPSU did so in the form of the *All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), Short Course*, and this document gave their game away completely, to anyone with eyes to see. Yet leading Western communists preferred not to see what was in front of their eyes.

The Marxists Internet Archive in 2008 put up the [*All-Union Communist Party \(Bolsheviks\), Short Course*](#) in full for all to read. In addition it has [Khrushchev's 1956 speech to the 20th Congress of the CPSU](#), denouncing both Stalin and the *Short Course*. An extract from that speech pertaining to the *Short Course* is linked below.

With the *Short Course*, the core reversal or perversion of the CPSU in the Stalin period is laid bare. For a quick grasp of this inversion of communism see the work's [Conclusion](#). Interrogate it with the Fundamental Question of Philosophy, with which we began this 10-part course: How stands the relation between Subject and Object? In the *Short Course*, the Subject of History is not educated, but is "guided". Herein lies the whole disaster.

It was a practical certainty that the leadership of our South African Revolution would again at some point make the same error of attempting to demolish the popular Subject. Under President Mbeki, that is what happened. It is bound to be the case that another such revolutionary crisis will arrive, perhaps soon. This Communist University course, and the whole of the Communist University initiative, is dedicated to the victory of popular agency in that struggle, and in all such struggles thereafter.

People's Education for People's Power!

Power to the People!

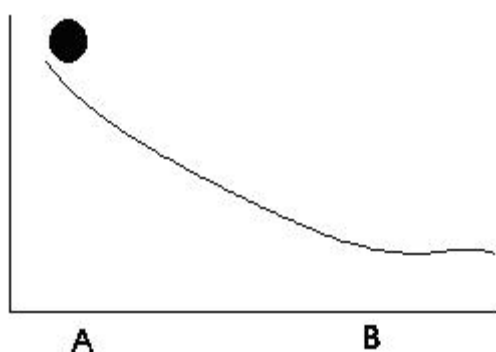
- The above is to introduce the original reading-texts: [Cuba - A Nation Becoming a University, DuRand, MRZine](#), and [Khrushchev, 20th CPSU Congress, 1956, Extracts re 'Short Course'](#).



[Ron Press, 1929 - 2009](#)

Power to the People!

The late South African revolutionary Ron Press provides a very good stepping-off point from our course because he shows clearly where the open end of this study is located. In the next proletarian revolution we must have what the Bolsheviks did not have, which is a clear philosophical theory of how society is going to work without a state. We are still looking for such a theory.

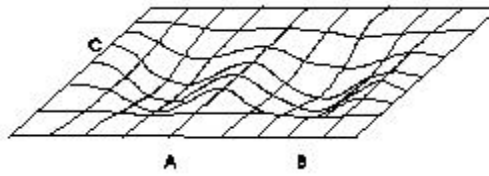


In “[New Tools for Marxists](#)” (download linked below), [Ron Press](#) wrote:

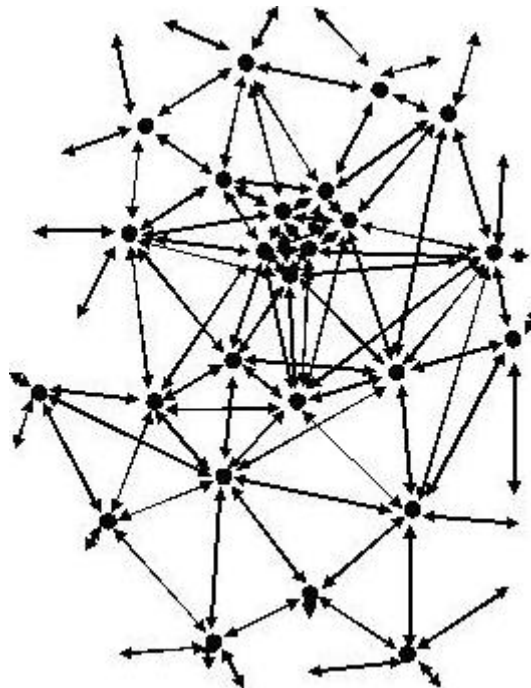
*“...the standard Marxist idea that society passes in a linear manner from primitive communism via class struggle to the ultimate victory when the working class replaces capitalism with a classless society is **an unattainable myth**. Especially when a classless society was taken to mean the establishment of order and stability, in fact stasis. The theories [outlined above] indicate that stasis means the inevitable sudden crossover into chaos and collapse.*

‘Lenin in “State and Revolution” continued the work of Engels and Marx in outlining the parameters which form the basis for the definition of systems

indicated by points (a) and (b). It is interesting that they did not define the form or structure which socialism will have. Lenin recognised these new structures when they emerged. He initiated the slogan “all power to the soviets”.’



Ron Press is saying that the theory of the State, and of the “withering away” of the State, in Marx, Engels and Lenin is not wrong, yet these three revolutionaries did not have the full theoretical means to appreciate in full how “stateless” systems can, and already do, work in nature and in human society.



A “stateless” self-balancing system

The revolutionaries of today have an advantage over those of a century ago. That being the case, we might imagine a “State and Revolution” for today, that would include not only the material that Lenin would have included in 1917 if he had had the time, but also material that Lenin would have included in the intervening period up to the present time, if he had had the knowledge of it.

Ron Press’s article gives a good start for that work. Please download it and read it. The diagrams above, relating to the “[Strange Attractor](#)” of [Chaos Theory](#), and to the stability-anarchy self-correcting system, are from the article.

The matter sits like this: In the past, “stateless” ungoverned systems could be postulated but not described or fully imagined. The “withering away of the state” remained a somewhat mystical and to its opponents, ridiculous concept. But now, because of the theoretical advances that Ron Press shows us, it can be seen that most systems (both human and natural) operate in fact without a “state” (or king, for that matter) and that the “state” is the exception, not the rule in human society. Further, the imposition of a “state”, far from being the guarantee of order, is, according to chaos theory, the certain harbinger, not of stability, but of disorder.

This is an unexpected vindication of Marxism, but a highly useful one. It means that future revolutionaries will have the possibility to see much further forward than was the case in Lenin’s time.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [New tools for Marxists, 1995, Ron Press.](#)
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Course: Philosophy and Religion

18002, Philosophy and Religion, Introductions Booklet 2 of 2

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